The Strange Case of MARY PAGE

The Great McClure Mystery Story, Written by FREDERICK LEWIS In Collaboration With JOHN T. M'INTYRE, Author of the Ashton Kirk Detective Stories. ***Read the Story and See the Essanay Moving Pictures***

SYNOPSIS.

Mary Page, actress, is accused of the murder of James Pollock and is defended by her lover, Philip Langdon. Pollock was intoxicated. At Mary's trial she admits she had the revolver. Her maid testifies that Mary threatened Pollock with it previously, and Mary's leading man implicates Langdon. How Mary disappeared from the scene of the crime is a mystery. Brandon tells of a strange hand print he saw on Mary's shoulder. Further evidence shows that horror of drink produces temporary insanity in Mary. The defense is "repressed psychosis." Witnesses described Mary's flight from her intoxicated father and her father's suicide. Nurse Walton describes the kidnaping of Mary by Pollock.

STAGE ASPIRATIONS

NOT since the famous trial that sent the expression "brain storm" spinning down through the years, has the testimony of an alienist so greatly stirred an excited world as did the phrase "Repressed Psychosis," with which Dr. Foster summed up the temporary insanity of Mary Page.

It spread through the court and the throngs in the corridor; it sped over the telephone wires to the waiting newspapers of the city. It even reached the zenith of publicity and became the inspiration of the cartoonists, but all this was after that day when Dr. Foster, once more upon the witness-stand, told with technical brevity of how prenatal influence, increased by fear and suffering, re-acted upon the delicate brain tissues under the strain of a great shock.

Much of what he said was entirely unintelligible to the excited audience. It was therefore with a little rustling sigh of relief that they heard Langdon abruptly change his line of questioning and say:

"How long after the night at Dr. Zellar's sanatorium did Miss Page remain in your hospital?"

"It was nearly three weeks before she was able to go, and even then it was with some trepidation that I consented to her leaving."

"Did you fear a return of—her—illness?"

"Yes. I knew that excitement or a nervous strain of any sort would have

"Did you fear a return of—her—illness?"

an injurious effect, and I warned both Mrs. Page and Mr. Langdon to protect her as much as possible."

"Dr. Foster, did you ever see James Pollock after the night he took Miss Page to Zellar's?"

"Yes. I saw him again on the day when Miss Page left my sanatorium."

"Will you tell us the circumstances of that second meeting, please?"

"Miss Page and her mother and Mr. Langdon were just about to leave, in order to take a train to New York when Mr. Pollock drove up to the sanatorium in his motor. I was very indignant at his daring to come to the hospital after what had occurred, and asking the Pages and Mr. Langdon to go into my office and wait, I went to the door myself and peremptorily ordered Mr. Pollock to leave the grounds. He refused to go, saying that he had something of great importance to say to Miss Page. He would not, he said, ask to see her alone, but it was his right to see her if he wished, because their engagement had not been broken. I felt that in the circumstances it was best to let him see Miss Page and receive his dismissal. So I took him into the office."

"Did Miss Page show any distress at sight of him?"

"Yes. She gave a little cry almost of fear and clung to her mother, and would not answer his greeting."

"What did Mr. Pollock say?"

"He said, 'You have no reason to shrink from me like that, Mary. At worst what I have done has been because I loved you. You have promised to marry me, and so far that promise has not been taken back, and now I have come to know what you are going to do. It seems to me that we ought to be married at once—as—as—I have information that your father's death has left you—without—well, without the comforts that I will be glad to give you. I have waited for three weeks for some word from you, and now I have come to claim my fiance!'"

"Did Miss Page reply?"

"Yes. She went up to him boldly and said without any signs of nervousness of the moment before, 'If I have not taken back my promise, James, it is because I have been too ill to think of it. But I do take it back now. I will never marry you so long as I live, and I never want you to speak to me again. I detest you, and since you can no longer harm my father, the reason for my promise to you is gone. That is all I have to say. Good-bye.' At that Pollock got very white and said hoarsely, 'Does that mean that you are going to marry Langdon?' 'It means,' she said, 'that after what has happened I shall never marry anyone. We are going to New York, where I hope to secure a position.'"

"Did Mr. Pollock show any surprise at that?"

"No, but he was obviously chagrined. And then I interfered and reminded Mrs. Page that they would miss their train if there was any further delay, and they left, Pollock driving away in his machine almost directly back of them."

"Did Miss Page seem calm and collected?"

"Yes, outwardly; but there was a look in her eyes that made me fearful for her future, and her hands had resumed their nervous twitching when I put her into the automobile.

"It made me realize that the great influence to fear for her was Pollock, and it is my decided opinion that if, as I have heard, he continued to persecute the defendant, the result would—"

"I object!" stormed the District Attorney, leaping to his feet. "Dr. Foster's last assertion that the defendant's mental ailment was aggravated through the continued persecution of James Pollock, is hearsay evidence, and a direct maligning of a dead man."

"I sustain that objection," said the judge sternly, adding to the doctor. "You must restrict yourself to answering questions, Dr. Foster. Let the answer be stricken out from the words, 'into the automobile.'"

The doctor, a flush of annoyance on his face, turned questioningly toward Langdon.

"No more questions," said Langdon.

But the prosecutor had. He got to his feet with the alacrity of a fighting man going into battle. With a tongue steeped in vitriol he attacked the testimony of the alienist; he held Mary Page up as a hysterical girl who had sought notoriety; he flung doubt upon the possibility of a "temporary" mental derangement, but though he tortured Mary until with shuddering horror she sank forward in her chair, her hands pressed against her ears to shut out the sound of his voice, he could not shake the smiling imperturbability of Dr. Foster.

Cross examination meant nothing to the latter, and much as he regretted the strain upon the pitiful little prisoner, he really enjoyed pitting his power against that of the prosecutor.

So his answers came with cool deliberation, and a hint of insolence that won the admiration of the spectators who were divided between zest in the stirring battle and pity for Mary. But it was the sympathy that came uppermost.

At last, unable to bear any longer the brutal wrangle over her sanity, Mary leaped to her feet, a little moaning cry of protest wrung from her white lips. Langdon was at her side in an instant, his hands drawing her down into her chair again, his lips whispering encouragement and comfort, till she smiled up at him—a wavering, pathetic little smile.

To the prosecutor in his present savage humor it seemed a carefully planned bit of by-play, yet he could so plainly see its effect upon the jury, and could read so clearly the antagonism growing in their eyes when they looked at him, that with an abrupt shrug he swung upon his heel and sat down with a curt, "That's all."

That released Dr. Foster, and sent him back triumphantly to the witness-room. There were two newcomers there now, a sweet-faced matronly looking woman of middle age, rather old-fashioned in her dress, and a young girl of about twenty-five who was divided between nervous fears and youthful zest. She was destined to be the next witness, and Dr. Foster smiled involuntarily when he saw her. Most people smiled at Amy, for that matter, for she was bubbling over with youth and laughter, but for all that, her gaiety was backed up by the shrewdness of the modern girl who fights her own battles promptly and successfully.

Her tailored suit and soft blouse open at the throat were smartly cut, and her hat was a hint daring in its shape and the way it was tilted over her little nose, and when the bailiff called her name, "Miss Amy Barton," her agitation led her to tip it at an even more dangerous angle as she tried to powder her nose and kiss her mother at the same time.

"I'm scared blue!" she confided to the other witnesses in a shaky voice. "A first night is a cinch to this. What do I have to say?"

"You have only to answer questions," said Dr. Foster, "and there is really nothing to be frightened about."

"I suppose not," she answered as she went through the door, "but I wouldn't care anyway, I'd go be hanged if it would help Mary."

Under the careless words there was a sudden deeper note of sincerity, and the moment she was on the stand she turned to the judge and said:

"I don't know what I am supposed to do, your Honor, but I want to tell you right here, that Mary Page is the best, and the bravest and the truest girl in the whole wide world."

For the first time the judge smiled; then he leaned forward and said kindly:

"The Court appreciates your admiration for the prisoner, but you must confine your remarks, while on the stand, to the answers to questions which will be asked you."

"Oh, yes, I was told that," she answered readily. "But I forgot." Then turning to Langdon she added cheerily, "Fire away, Mr. Langdon, I'm all ready."

A little gust of laughter rippled through the court. Then Langdon, coming close to the witness stand, said quietly:

"Miss Barton, you know the defendant, Mary Page, do you?"

"Why, of course I do, you goat!" she answered with a bubbling laugh that found an echo in the room. But Langdon frowned, and his voice was more harsh as he said, "Please answer yes, or no, and remember that if you want to aid Miss Page, you must make your answers short and to the point. Now will you please tell the court just when and how you first met Miss Page?"

"It was some years ago, and she and her mother came to our apartment with a note from Cousin Alice Cowes, who lived in New Town. Cousin Alice had sent them to us because she knew we had an extra room we wanted to rent, and she thought that I could help Mary land a job."

"What sort of—er—position?"

"In the merry-merry—that is, on the stage. I'd been across the foots myself for a couple of seasons and Cousin Alice said Mary wanted to become an actress and thought I could show her how to make the rounds. It's a tough proposition getting a job in New York with no friends and no pull."

"Will you tell the court, please, Miss Barton, about the first position secured by Miss Page and of the events that led up to it?"

"Well, it just happened that the day Mary hit the big town I had a date with Webster, the real boss of the musical comedies. Of course he isn't the sort that you'd want to send your little sister from the country to see, but too much hedging don't go in the show business worth a whoop. You've got to trust to a sharp tongue and a hat-pin till you show them where they get off, and once they're wise, they treat you all right. Webster was like that, but if he promises you a part he plays fair, so I never was afraid to buck his office-boy even on a busy day. So off we went.

"I had an appointment with the old man, but he was scrapping with one of his 'romantic leads'—you could hear them clear out to the front hall—and it was a long time before I could persuade his little cerberus to go in and tell him I was waiting. At any rate, he came out at last blowing blasts of red fire after the actor—and then he saw Mary. Talk about lions and lambs! Why, he purred when he saw her, and he was so sweet to me I almost got a leading lady's contract out of him before he woke up, and began to ask me questions about Mary. Then he tried to kiss her and I put an inch or so of my hat pin in his arm just above the elbow. Mary and I beat it while the going was good, and Mary was so upset we decided to go right home instead of calling on any of the other managers. That was how we happened to run into Jim Pollock."

"Where did you meet Mr. Pollock?"

"Oh, he was on the job at the apartment when we got home. Playing the humble but persistent swain—wanted to lay his fortune at her feet and give her a life of gilded ease. He pleaded all that sort of soft-music stuff, and told her she didn't realize how cruel the world was to a girl (men always say that) and how she would suffer to see her mother growing old and lacking the comforts she could not earn for her. Then he pulls out his wallet and taps it, saying, 'All that I have is yours, Mary, even if you don't marry me.' Business of soft music!"

"Were you in the room while this was going on?"

"No," she answered, winning a gale of laughter from the court-room, "but you can't brush your teeth in a New York apartment without the people in the next door flat hearing you, and everything that Mary said or Jim Pollock said, might as well have been shouted through a megaphone."

"Did Miss Page seem touched by Mr. Pollock's offer?" said Langdon, repressing a smile with difficulty.

"No, she stood up to him spunkily and told him flat where he got off. 'I'm going to get work,' she said, 'but even if I didn't my mother and I would never accept any help from you. I have only one thing to ask, and that is that you leave here at once and do not come again.' He came out in the hall where I had the door all nicely opened for him. I told him sweetly that I'd opened it for him to get out, but I'd be shot before it ever opened to let him in again. I ran back to the sitting-room, to find Mary in a dead faint. It was such a long time before she came round, and then she was so dazed and terrified that we were all scared to death, and I swore a solemn vow then and there that I'd be the busiest little stage mother and chaperon and advice giver to Mary that any girl ever had."

Her voice suddenly trembled, and the quick tears filled her eyes as, turning to Mary, she cried eagerly:

"And, Mary, I've kept my word, haven't I? Haven't I?"

Mary nodded, smiling through her own tears, and the spectators who throughout the breezy testimony of the young actress had been in gales of laughter, suddenly sobered. They saw the brave heart under the butterfly exterior, and realized the wisdom and the goodness behind the vulgar words.

Langdon, seeing the judge frown at this shattering of legal precedent, asked his next question quickly.

"You and Miss Page did secure positions in the same company, did you not?"

"Oh, yes, in 'The Blue Feather.' Mary took to it like a duck to water, and made a hit with the stage manager before he'd got through calling the rest of us all the names in his vocabulary. So when it came to one bit where the fat tenor had to choose a girl out of the chorus to sing an encore with him, Mary got the chance, and made good, too. But that was afterwards."

"She told him flat where he got off."

"Well, suppose you tell us what occurred on the day 'The Blue Feather' opened."

"Oh, the day was the same as any other opening day. We'd rehearsed half the night and started in at eight-thirty in the morning, and we were all tired to death and wished we were dead. It's always like that a few hours before the overture on an opening night, so Mary and I were mighty glad to slip out home and rest an hour before going back to make up. We didn't dare stay long, though, for being late is the worst sin in the box at a show-shop, so it was round about seven when we got on our lids and were ready to beat it back. Just when we were leaving, though, mother came running in and said, 'Oh, Mary, Philip Langdon is here and he wants to see you just a minute before you leave.' At that Mary lights all the lamps in her eyes, and went into the sitting room with me a close second.

"Mr. Langdon was there talking to Mrs. Page and when we came in she called out, 'Mary, Philip has given up his practice in New Town and has come here to live.' At that he came over and took Mary's hand in both of his and said, 'Please be glad, Mary. I heard that Pollock had gone into business here and I worried so about you. I felt I had to come. Let me be your friend and protector, even if I can't be anything more, won't you, Mary?' 'Oh, but you oughtn't to give up your practice, Phil,' she said, beginning, just like a woman, to kick against the thing that pleased her most. 'You—you—may not like it here.' But he laughed at that, and they began to talk so much that I got worried and butted in by reminding Mary that she was an actress now and had to hustle. Then Mr. Langdon had to be told all about it, and the result was we had to run three blocks to get in at the stage door before they began to keep tabs on

"Mary lights all the lamps in her eyes."

the late comers. Mr. Langdon was to go with mother and Mrs. Page, and I soon spotted them up in the balcony, for the management doesn't hand out boxes for the families of its front row of the chorus, but in one of the boxes I did see a familiar face—that of Pollock. He was all gotten up in soup and fish, but he was alone, and I could see that he was taking Mary all in, and then some. Mary had told me a lot about him, and the piker way he'd acted, and she'd also told me a lot about Mr. Langdon, so I decided that I wouldn't put her wise to the fact that Pollock was there, but would let her play to the balcony, which she did. She was so pretty and so happy that she got a silly song over big, and even the tenor had the decency to make her go on and take a curtain with him. Everybody just made a fuss over her till Mary fairly cried, she was so happy. And the part that seemed to please her most was that she had seen Langdon applauding his hands off up stairs."

"Did you join your mother and Mrs. Page after the show?" interrupted Langdon warningly.

"That was the big idea," she said. "But it hit the rocks, for when Mary and I hustled into our glad rags and started for the door we bumped squarely into the stage manager and Mr. Pollock—the latter all done up to kill, even to a top hat. 'Oh, Miss Page,' sings out Ecky (that's the manager) 'here's a gentleman from your home town, that wants to take you out to supper and see you home in a buzz wagon.' He laughed nastily as he spoke, and I could feel Mary's hand go cold as ice as she grabbed mine and says, 'I have no desire to take supper with Mr. Pollock, either now or at any other time to come, Amy.' But that made old Ecky sore, so he began to roar like a bull and shouts, 'What's this? Are you crazy?' But Pollock interrupted him—there was a quick business of being hurt to the heart; the misunderstood soul—and the chivalry stunt was pulled off without a break. Then he says, 'Miss Page is quite within her rights. I do not wish an unwilling guest. Perhaps my moment of renewing her acquaintance was inopportune,' and he stalks away for all the world like the heavy in the third act. But old Ecky was up in the air, and he began rowing Mary for fair. He told her, the dog, that it was her beauty, not her talent, that 'got the house,' and added, 'It's your business here to be civil to your admirers and go to supper when they ask you. If you're goin' to ride a high horse I've got no use for you in this show.'"

"Did Miss Page answer him?"

"No, I think she was too horrified, and old Ecky, thinkin' that silence meant consent, told her to stay there till he brought Mr. Pollock back. The minute his back was turned I gave Mary the cue to get away quick, but we didn't have to, for just then Mr. Langdon came in, and we beat it for him. We didn't have time to tell him what had happened before old Ecky came back with Mr. Pollock and they both stopped short when they saw Mr. Langdon with us, and then Mr. Pollock drawls out, 'You see this Miss Page is not so virtuous as she pretends. She's not even particular in her choice—everybody knows that.' He must have intended us to hear, but what he didn't give any high sign for, was for Mr. Langdon to make a jump and grab him by the throat, shouting that he'd have to eat his words or he'd kill him. Old Ecky is deathly afraid of a fight and began to holler for the stage crew, but I got out my little old trusty hat-pin and promised anybody that came near two or three inches of it, so the men just stood around swearing and grinning behind their hands till Mr. Pollock was licked to a standstill and asked Mr. Langdon to let up. Then Mr. Langdon ordered him out of the theatre, and he—went! But while he was on his way I'd spied a pen and some ink on the prompt desk, and made Mary write out our joint resignation which we handed to old Ecky [illegible] as the stage crew had gone back to work. It was a knockout for old Ecky. You see, he knew Mary had made a hit, and that the show had got over good, and to have to train in two new recruits for our parts before the next night was some job. So he turned on the soft soap, but we beat it towards the door, and Mr. Langdon marches up to Ecky and hands him his card, saying calmly, 'These girls are quite within their rights because of what has happened. Added to which I understand that you told Miss Page you did not need her if she wouldn't accept the attentions of men obnoxious to her. Well, I'm a lawyer and I'll look after their interests. You can send your attorney to me at any time.'

"So we got away and went home—jobless but happy. Of course when we told them at home Mrs. Page said Mary must give up her stage career, but she was too spunky for that."

"She said no, that the mistake she'd made was in getting a chorus job, and that if I was willing we might try for some small road company and work our way up in the 'drama'. I would have followed Mary any place, so I said I was on, and we even talked Mr. Langdon down before he left."

"That is all, thank you, Miss Barton," said Langdon with a smile as she finished, and Amy, looking around bewildered, asked the judge confidentially:

"What do I do now, your Honor?"

"You answer a few questions for me," said the prosecutor with a honeyed sweetness. "Miss Barton, you are a very good actress, are you not?"

"Go ask my press agent!" she answered pertly; and he flushed.

"Well, at any rate you can be very convincing in saying things—let's call it reciting lines—that have nothing to do with events that really happened, can't you? Especially in a sympathetic role?"

"If you're trying to put anything across," she said slowly, "you've come to the wrong shop. I took the oath and I don't swear to tell the truth and then lie. I'm an actress, not a lawyer."

A burst of laughter swept the room, and the judge's gavel came down sharply, though the corners of his mouth twitched as he said to Amy:

"You must confine your remarks to answering the questions put you, Miss Barton."

"I am," she replied imperturbably, and the prosecutor flushed as he asked sharply:

"Isn't it true that you said you would do anything in the world to save Mary Page?"

"Isn't it true that you're doing everything in the world to ruin her?"

"That is not answering my question," roared the prosecutor. "This is contempt of court—you have sworn to tell the truth—tell it."

"Tell it to a policeman!" scoffed Amy. "I have told the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, and there isn't any more to tell, unless you'll let me tell you what poor business I think you have for your part of the show."

"Silence!" roared the judge and the prosecutor in unison, and now Amy,

"I do not wish an unwilling guest."

looking up at his Honor, smiled and brought into view a dimple, as she said quietly,

"Your Honor, I don't mind answering questions, but I'm so used to being hollered at in rehearsals that the usual line of chatter just slips out."

Again a gale of laughter swept the room, and the prosecutor, realizing that the pertness of the actress was a shield behind which he could not penetrate, and feeling that her testimony was after all unimportant, dismissed her with a shrug.

At her glad, "Oh, can I go?" the laughter broke out afresh; but it died away when she ran straight to Mary's side, and before the bailiff or Langdon could stop her, had leaned over and impulsively kissed her cheek.

"You darling!" she cried, and suddenly burst into tears—the genuine childish sobs of one whose heart is overflowing with pity. When she was led back to the witness-room she was no longer an obscure little actress—she was famous. For the time at least she even overshadowed Mary—so much does the old world love those who laugh and yet have tender hearts beneath the gaiety.

(To be continued.)